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Policy and people

Middle East cancer consortium starts business

The Middle East Cancer Consortium (MECC) is about to make public its first solicitation for research grant proposals. Its first project will be a regional cancer registry in Cyprus, Egypt, Israel, Jordan, and the Palestinian Authority. At a meeting this month in Cyprus, "it was agreed . . . that the principal investigator is the basis for the success of any new registration project and as the primary link between the local government and the project. Outside of adequate funding and active support by the participating member states, such as legislating cancer as a notifiable disease, nothing is as important", said Michael Silberman, executive director of MECC.

Initial funding of US\$500 000 per year for 5 years comes from the US National Cancer Institute and National Institutes of Health; NCI is also supporting training costs up to \$250 000 per year for 5 years. Federico Welsch, associate director for International Affairs at NCI, said that the idea is that the project will "gradually become the full responsibility of the governments", which will "naturally seek other funding, such as from the European Community". Hans H Storm (Copenhagen, Denmark), who chairs the advisory board and is head of cancer prevention and epidemiological research at the Danish Cancer Society, said "gradual transfer of financial and management responsibility minimises risk to the governments and maximises their capacity for taking on a financial commitment that should continue for 20, 30, maybe 40 years, or until we solve the cancer problem".

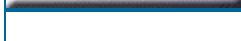
The research grants are for collaborative projects between at least two MECC member states, each one of which will be entitled to \$15 000 support per year, eligible for renewal after scientific review. Rengaswamy Sankaranarayanan (Lyon, France) of the International Agency for Research on Cancer said that these are "not the typical competition. Most important is to provide a critique precisely to improve the application; every applicant is entitled to resubmit a revised application that has been turned down", because "the purpose of the process is to encourage and raise the standard of inquiry; to stimulate people who have not indulged in research into indulging; thus to facilitate the whole process".

Rachelle H B Fishman

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